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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7925
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1938
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1357
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4921
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4879
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8445
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6007
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1515
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1710
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 0366
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3901
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1859
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 RANGOON 000575

SIPDIS

STATE FOR INL/HSTC; EAP/MLS; G/TIP
DEPT OF LABOR FOR ILAB
GENEVA FOR LABOR ATTACHE
BANGKOK FOR LABOR/TIP OFFICER
PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [KCRM](#) [KFRD](#) [ASEC](#) [PREF](#) [ELAB](#) [SMIG](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: BURMA: ENCOURAGING COOPERATION ON TIP WITH CHINA
AND THAILAND

REF: A. RANGOON 158
 [B.](#) RANGOON 113
 [C.](#) BANGKOK 1588

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Classified By: Economic Officer Samantha A. Carl-Yoder for reasons 1.4
(b and d)

[¶](#)1. (C) Summary. Recognizing that the majority of Burmese trafficking victims cross Burma's long, porous borders into China and Thailand, the Burmese Government, in conjunction with several international NGOs, is working with the Chinese and Thai Governments to establish bilateral liaison offices (BLOs) at key points on the Burma border. The Chinese Government and GOB agreed in February to open a BLO on the border of Lwe Je, Kachin State; the BLO should be operational by the end of 2008. According to Police Colonel Sit Aye, the Thai Government continues to drag its feet on negotiations of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for bilateral cooperation on trafficking issues. The Thai Government will not consider opening BLOs along the Burmese border until said agreement is finalized. Despite the lack of an MOU, the Burmese and Thai Governments have worked together on TIP issues, including the recent case of smuggled Burmese migrants into Ranong Province. GOB offices, including the Anti-Trafficking Unit (ATU), local police, and Department of Social Welfare, assisted with the repatriation of 57 Burmese citizens. The ATU is conducting joint investigations with the Thai police to find the brokers. Col. Sit Aye informally responded to the 2008 TIP Report, inquiring why the USG did not recognize the ATU's efforts in 2007 to combat trafficking. End Summary.

Promoting Cooperation on the Border

12. (SBU) According to officials from UNIAP and Save the Children, the Burmese Government, particularly the police, has taken steps in the past six months to address the international trafficking of Burmese people. Col. Sit Aye, head of the police-lead Anti-Trafficking Unit (ATU), underscored that despite the lack of official statistics on the trafficking of Burmese into China and Thailand, the ATU has ramped up efforts to monitor the movements of people over these borders. However, the ATU has a limited number of staff who cannot cover the entire porous border, he admitted.

Consequently, the GOB has made it a priority to establish bilateral liaison offices (BLOs) along the borders of China and Thailand, which would enable the governments to share information about trafficking, narcotics, and other transnational crimes (Ref A). The Chinese and Burmese Government established the first BLOs in Muse, Burma and Ruili, China in July 2007. Staff from these BLOs successfully cooperated to assist more than 25 Burmese women and children last year, Col. Sit Aye stated.

13. (SBU) The Burmese Government remains committed to expanding the BLO program, he commented. During a meeting with the Chinese Government in February, the Minister of Home Affairs proposed opening a new bilateral liaison office in Lwe Je, Kachin State - another key border crossing. Although the Chinese initially resisted, noting that Lwe Je was only a one and half hour drive from Ruili (a 15-hour drive from Muse on the Burma side), the Chinese Government agreed to open the BLO. The number of trafficking victims traveling from Kachin State to China increased in 2007; the Chinese and Burmese Governments coordinated to repatriate 14 Burmese citizens

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last year. Col. Sit Aye explained that it will take several months to establish the BLO: first, the Ministry of Home Affairs must select 3-4 ATU staff to man the new BLO; officials from the UN and the Australian Counter-trafficking Program will train both the Burmese and Chinese on TIP issues; and the Burmese staff will receive training on counter narcotics operations and Chinese language in Beijing.

He predicted the BLO would open by December 2008.

Thais Still Hesitant

14. (C) While the number of Burmese trafficked to China increases annually, Thailand continues to be the primary destination for Burmese trafficking victims, Col. Sit Aye emphasized. As a result, the GOB wants to open BLOs in Tachilek, Myawaddy, and Kauthaung - the three main crossing points for Burmese into Thailand. However, the Thai Government continues to drag its feet and will not open any BLOs until the Burmese and Thai Governments sign a formal memorandum of understanding outlining the BLO procedures, he noted. The Burmese and Thai Governments have been negotiating a memorandum of understanding since May 2007; during a meeting in April, the Thai Government made additional changes to the document, delaying formalization of the MOU. The Minister of Home Affairs received the Thai Government's final version in May, which was submitted to the Senior General for approval, Col. Sit Aye explained. According to Col. Sit Aye, once the Senior General approves the document, the Minister of Home Affairs and the Thai Minister for Social Development and Human Security will sign the MOU, perhaps as early as August. (Note: Embassy Bangkok sources confirm that the Government of Thailand is ready to sign the MOU but is waiting for the appointment of a new Foreign Minister before doing so. End Note.)

Informal Coordination Occurs

15. (C) Despite the lack of an MOU, the Burmese and Thai Governments have informally coordinated on anti-trafficking

issues in 2008, ATU member Major Nyunt Hlaing told us. The Burmese police assisted the Thai police in the investigation of the April 2007 case involving 122 Burmese who were smuggled to Thailand (Ref C). Major Nyunt Hlaing explained that the Burmese police assisted with the repatriation of the 57 survivors, working with the Ministry of Social Welfare to provide them with temporary shelter, medicines, and food in Kauthaung (directly across from Ranong Province). Save the Children TIP Director Guy Caves told us that the local police and social welfare officials treated the victims well, contacting their families immediately upon their return to Burma and providing them with transport to their villages two weeks later. Caves lauded the GOB's decision to not keep the victims in the local shelter for an extended period of time, noting that after the traumatic experience, they needed to return to a safe environment where the victims felt at home. Social welfare officials continue to check on the 57 victims to ensure their welfare, Major Nyunt Hlaing noted.

¶6. (C) According to Col. Sit Aye, the police continue to work with the Thais, establishing an investigative team in Kauthaung to track down the trafficking offenders. ATU officials believe that hotel operators in Kauthaung and Dawei are running a smuggling ring, assisting Burmese who want to cross the border into Thailand. Based on information

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received from the Thai police, ATU and local police officers are investigating several people, including hotel owners U Saw Mu and U Thone Bein, but have yet to make an arrest, Col. Sit Aye told us. In June, the Thai police arrested one Burmese citizen living in Phuket, suspected of involvement in the Ranong case. Because the suspect violently resisted arrest, he will remain in Thai custody. GOB officials have yet to interrogate him, but are working with the Thai Government to ascertain whether he has connections to the alleged smuggling ring in Kauthaung and Dawei.

Enhancing Coordination with the NGOS

¶7. (C) Officials from Save the Children and World Vision, the two international NGOs working on trafficking issues in Burma, emphasized that the Anti-Trafficking Unit has taken steps to improve cooperation with NGOs. Cave informed us that the Ministry of Home Affairs invited both Save the Children and World Vision to participate in the meetings with the Chinese and Thais earlier this year. The younger, more inexperienced police officials often seek assistance from the Save the Children office in Muse, sharing information on suspected trafficking cases, he noted. Dr. Ivan Saw, Trafficking Coordinator for World Vision, highlighted that the ATU has involved the NGOs in repatriation cases, seeking assistance on how to best help trafficking victims. Both Cave and Saw noted that the ATU, which is committed to working on cross-border trafficking issues, lacks the staff, capacity, and resources to expand its mandate to internal trafficking. The NGOs believe that opportunities also exist to work with the ATU staff, particularly the younger police officers, about the need to address domestic trafficking and forced prostitution issues.

Responding to the 2008 TIP Report

¶8. (C) During our meeting with Col. Sit Aye, he raised the issue of the 2008 TIP report, noting that the Minister of Home Affairs had received our June 6 Diplomatic Note and copy of the report. The Minister of Home Affairs questioned why Burma was still listed as a Tier III country, since the ATU had worked hard to address trafficking issues in 2007, coordinating with its neighbors on cross-trafficking issues. While we acknowledged the efforts of the ATU, we explained that the Burmese Government needed to do more to prevent domestic trafficking, as well as address the root causes of

forced labor and military perpetration of force labor. Col. Sit Aye said he understood the need for the Burmese military to prevent the use of forced labor, but noted that the TIP report regretfully had become "politicized" on both sides.

Comment

19. (C) The GOB has long recognized the importance of addressing cross-border trafficking issues, and has recently begun to address domestic trafficking. We view their efforts as sincere, which could benefit from more training. Cyclone Nargis, which devastated Burma in early May, displaced hundreds of thousands of people, making them vulnerable to trafficking (to be reported septel). UN agencies have predicted that Burmese domestic and international trafficking rates will increase in the aftermath of the cyclone, as

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people look for new opportunities and ways to earn a living. NGOs and UN agencies continue to monitor the movement of people, looking for ways to ensure cyclone victims regain their livelihoods as quickly as possible, so they do not become trafficking victims as well. We should encourage closer coordination of the GOB with NGOs and UN agencies, including through the provision of training to prevent the further trafficking of women, men, and children within and across Burma's borders.

10. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Bangkok.

VILLAROSA